



## Vanessa Bowden, University of Otago: Blenheim to Foster

In July this year I had the opportunity to fly across the ditch and have a 2 week long rural medicine experience in the loveliest town of Foster in the region of South Gippsland, a 2 hour trip south-east of Melbourne, VIC. I arrived in Melbourne a few days earlier to make the most of my trip and experienced the fun and shopping opportunities of a very cultural and bubbly city.

From there I travelled down to Foster and made myself at home for the next 2 weeks, staying and working alongside Michael, a fellow medical student who is based in Foster.

Foster is a small town of roughly 3000 people situated right in the middle of 'Prom Country' – the entrance to Wilson's Promontory, a national park amongst mainland Australia's southern most point. The area of South Gippsland is mainly dairy and some beef farming so much of its population are farmers. Linking some of the towns in this area is a beautiful 68km Great Southern Rail Trail which I ran and cycled along a few times.

Foster has a hospital with 16 beds plus 3 for emergency/outpatients. It has an operating theatre and delivery suite enabling there to be a reasonable amount of obstetrics. Next door to the hospital there is an allied health building and Foster Medical Centre (impressive in size considering the size of the town it serves) which is linked with Toora Medical Centre in a neighbouring town. The medical centre has 10 GPs and as a result of its size services an area of an hour's radius from Foster. The GPs there service the clinic as well as the hospital.

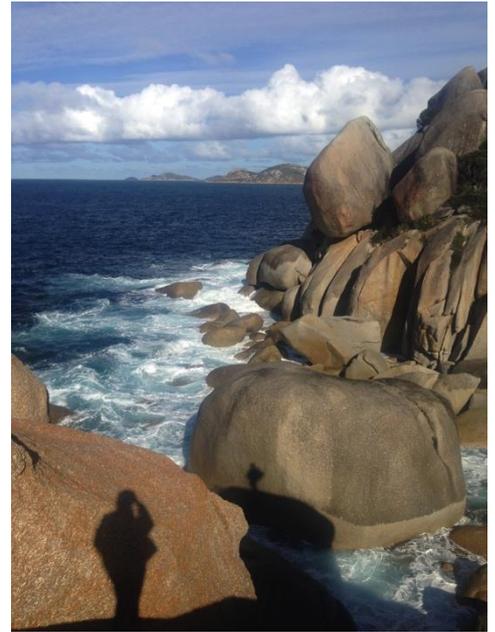


When I was in Foster I mixed between being at the hospital depending on what was happening and sitting in and consulting in the GP clinic. This was a fantastic opportunity to experience general practice in a different country and it gave me the chance to sit in alongside a number of different GPs too which I thought was really wonderful. I spent a day in the delivery suite, a day in theatre and between that and GP. For the rest of the time I went wherever there was excitement. I was told that there was usually a much greater elderly population in Foster however due to it being Winter there tends to be a large exodus of them escaping to Queensland and beyond for a warmer winter. Understandably too because it got really cold when I was there, I think these people are being very sensible, it must mean that a lot of respiratory and influenza illness are prevented.

In addition to being in Foster I went to Leongatha, a larger town 40mins from Foster for the medical student tutorials. There I met some of the other students who are doing their 4<sup>th</sup> year (which is the

equivalent of our 5<sup>th</sup>) in a rural setting also. They have weekly paediatric and women's health tutes as well as other tutorials 2 days a week. The content and ways of teaching were very similar to back home so I found it easy enough to slot right in.

There were two younger GPs who really took me under their wing and who I had a lot of fun with. I think they really enjoyed the social contact too because in a place as small as Foster it is hard to find people the same age and the isolation can really get to you, I think, sometimes. We found lots of things to do in the evenings including playing a lot of UNO! and one of them, Nick, took me for a tour of Wilson's Prom where we spent the afternoon with a walk on one of the tracks with breath taking views. Everyone I'd met had recommended going to the prom and I was so glad I did. I would further recommend it to anyone ever in the area! As well as this I also visited the Agnes Falls nearby and Sandy Point, full of raw Australian beauty.



There are several differences that stood out to me, coming from the health care system in NZ. The major one being that we have PHARMAC. A small difference at the outset but what this essentially



means is that individual Australian pharmacists have to negotiate drug prices with the pharmaceutical companies themselves. This results in different drugs being used from one day to the next with confusing trade names so drug names for the prescribing doctor and patient change very often. What I quickly had to do was google every second drug name to translate it into generic names, not a good look I can imagine when you're at the doctor and someone is googling things!

All in all I had a wonderful time with the crew at Foster and would like to extend a huge amount of gratitude to everyone that helped me and pointed me in the right direction. Thank you to Monash University for having this exchange and RMIP for making this trip possible. I'd thoroughly recommend this exchange to anyone considering it.